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AUTHOR McKellar, Nancy A.; Hartshorne, Timothy S.
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ABSTRACT

A three-phase study was conducted to examine the types of instructional information requested by teachers and the ways in which school psychologists currently attempt to obtain such information and provide instructional consultation. In response to a questionnaire, first and fourth grade teachers reported concerns that they had about students, the information and suggestions that they want for dealing with such concerns, and the resource person who could best provide such information. Requests for answers to noninstructional questions were much more frequent than requests for instructional information. The most common instructional questions concerned appropriate methods and the ability level of the student. The school psychologist was the individual most often chosen to provide information to the teacher when the concern was academic or instructional in nature. (Author/CB)

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Information Desired by Teachers In Instructional Consultation

Nancy A. McKellar

Timothy S. Hartshorne

Wichita State University

Wichita, Kansas

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Abstract

First- and fourth-grade teachers reported concerns that they have about students, information and suggestions that they want for dealing with such problems, and the resource person who could best provide such information. Requests for answers to non-instructional questions were much more frequent than requests for instructional information. The most common instructional questions concerned appropriate methods and the ability level of the child. The school psychologist was the individual most often chosen to provide information to the teacher when the concern was academic/instructional in nature. Possible reasons for the teachers' responses and the relevance of the data to instructional consultation by school psychologists were discussed.

A major responsibility of the teacher is to provide instruction that will eventuate in children's learning. For several years, since the passage of the Public Law 94-142, regular education teachers have had instructional responsibility for children with varying handicapping conditions. In addition to needing help in planning the educational programs of identified special education students, teachers may also need assistance with instructional problems that arise involving regular education students. In some locations, such as Kansas, teachers are required to implement interventions within the classroom before a child can be considered for placement in a special instructional program.

Although teachers are required to instruct children with a wide range of educational needs and problems, they do not necessarily feel that they have the skills to meet the learning needs of all students in the classroom (Heron & Harris, 1982). In fact, teachers' perceptions of their abilities to teach the special needs child have been found to be a significant factor in determining the attitudes of regular classroom teachers toward having this type of child in their classes (Larrivee, 1982).

Few studies have focused on the role of the school

psychologist in instructional consultation with teachers (Hartshorne, 1981; McKellar, 1983). Gutkin, Singer, and Brown (1980) found that teachers want and benefit from consultation as to what and how students with academic problems should be taught. Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1982), studying the types of instructional planning information teachers receive from school psychologists, found that teachers desire information from a variety of sources, rather than primarily data from standardized tests. When they asked teachers to rate a long list of school psychologist activities, Lambert, Sandoval, and Corder (1975) found several services that would come under the rubric of instructional consultation were rated by the teachers as ones that should be increased. These included providing practical suggestions about methods of teaching difficult students, helping teachers select instructional materials for special groups of children, and helping teachers evaluate the possible utility of new materials and methods for teaching educationally handicapped children.

What has never been thoroughly examined are the specific types of instructional information and suggestions that teachers desire to aid them in instructional programming for those children who

present difficult academic problems. Possible types of such desired information could include the ability level of the student with respect to the curriculum; the content, methods, activities, and materials for instruction; and the skill prerequisites and sequencing of instruction required by a given student.

A three-phase study was conducted to examine the types of instructional information requested by teachers and the ways in which school psychologists currently attempt to obtain such information and provide instructional consultation. The initial phase of this research, which is reported in this paper, was a pilot investigation designed to establish the effectiveness of the research instrument and procedures for addressing the following questions: What are the types of instructional information desired by teachers in order to aid them in educating children who present problems in the classroom and with what frequency do they request instructional, as opposed to non-instructional, information for such situations? Do the types of instructional information requested by teachers vary, depending on the grade level of the students? Who is the person whom teachers feel could best answer their questions?

Method

Respondents

A random sample of 80 first- and fourth-grade regular education teachers from school in a Midwestern community were asked to participate in the study. A total of 31 first-grade teachers and 26 fourth-grade teachers completed questionnaires, representing an overall return rate of 71%.

Questionnaire

On the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to consider the child in their classrooms about whom they had the most concern. After answering descriptive questions about the selected child, the respondents explained the nature of the concern, what had already been done, what information and suggestions they would want for dealing with this child, and who could best provide such information. The list of 10 possible helpers included another teacher, the principal, and the parent, as well as support personnel.

Procedure

A cover letter, the questionnaire, and a stamped return envelope were sent to the homes of the 80 teachers in the sample. Respondents were asked to return an additional form if they wished to receive results of the study.

Results

The respondents were primarily experienced teachers, in that 65% of them had taught six or more years. Most of them (58%) teach in moderate-sized schools of 200 to 499 students.

The typical student of concern that was described by the respondents was a male (81%), who was in the regular classroom most or all of the day (91%), and who had been neither retained (70%) nor in a special program (81%). Approximately equal numbers of teachers had concerns that were academic/instructional (30%) and behavioral/emotional (28%) in nature, while somewhat more teachers (39%) had concerns that involved a combination of the two types of concerns. The type of concern did not differ significantly by grade level of the teachers ($\chi^2(2, N = 53) = 1.131, p<.568$).

Respondents gave an average of five suggestions or questions that they would want to ask someone about the described child. Table 1 contains the frequencies of different types of questions. The most frequently

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Insert Table 1 about here

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posed question concerned discipline and classroom management (23%). Other frequently asked questions had

to do with the emotional needs or values of the student (14%) and the cause or nature of the problem (13%). All of these common questions were considered to be non-instructional in nature.

The most frequently asked type of instructional question had to do with methods of instruction (8%). First-grade teachers were more interested (61%) in methods than fourth-grade teachers.

Overall, 80% of the questions posed were non-instructional as compared with the remaining 20% which were instructional. As would be expected, instructional questions were asked more when the concern was at least partly academic/instructional in nature. Non-instructional questions were posed more often for behavioral/emotional concerns. First-grade teachers asked slightly more of the instructional questions (56%) than did the fourth-grade teachers, whereas 52% of the non-instructional questions were asked by fourth-grade teachers.

In general, the counselor (25%) and the school psychologist (16%) were the individuals who were most often cited as being able to answer the questions posed by respondents. The helper selected varied according to the type of concern and the type of question asked, however. The school psychologist was the preferred

helper when the concern was academic/instructional in whole or in part. For behavioral/emotional concerns, the counselor was the most frequently selected helper ($\chi^2(36, N = 57) = 38.212, p<.018$). When

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Insert Table 2 about here

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instructional questions were asked, the school psychologist was selected (35%) as the individual best able to answer the questions. However, the counselor was selected (38%) as the person best able to help when non-instructional questions were posed.

Discussion

While the data reported here are limited to teachers in one Midwestern city, these results provide some interesting hypotheses for further research.

The first question to be considered concerned the kinds of instructional questions teachers ask. While the teachers in this sample identified approximately equal numbers of children for whom they had academic/instructional versus behavioral/emotional concerns, the questions they asked where overwhelmingly non-instructional. It is possible that teachers consider the instructional domain their area of expertise, and to ask questions about it would infer

their inadequacy as a teacher. This hypothesis receives some support from the kinds of instructional questions that were asked. The most common instructional question had to do with recommended methods to use with the particular child. The second most common concerned the ability level of the child. The former question does not imply that the teacher is unfamiliar with particular methods, only unsure which would be best for this child, and the latter implies the need for some special assessment that might be outside the expertise of the typical teacher. Questions related to the content of instruction, its sequencing, materials, and so on, information that teachers "ought" to know, were seldom asked.

The second research question concerned differences between first- and fourth-grade teachers in the kinds of questions asked. The differences between grade levels were small, indicating that teachers at both levels asked instructional questions equally often. Both groups of teachers posed more non-instructional questions, though.

The third research question dealt with whom the teacher would prefer to ask these questions of. The counselor and school psychologist were the clear favorites, but the counselor was first choice for

behavioral/emotional concerns, while the school psychologist was first choice when the concern was academic/instructional. This clearly has training and practice implications for school psychologists. While teachers may be reluctant to ask instructional questions even when their concern is primarily academic in nature, they are most likely to ask those questions of the school psychologist than of any other available resource person. Is this because the school psychologist is viewed as having the most relevant expertise, or because the school psychologist is viewed as frequently assessing cognitive functioning via intelligence testing? Or, is it because the school psychologist is less likely to have a teaching background, and so may offer a unique perspective and at the same time be less threatening to the teacher's sense of personal expertise? This is intriguing in light of the often asked question of the school psychologist as to whether s/he has been a teacher. While school psychologists without that background have historically been a bit defensive, it may in fact be a source of relief to the teacher when the answer is in the negative.

These hypotheses based on the results of this pilot study are only speculative. Data from a national

survey of teachers is in the process of analysis. These initial results clearly indicate, however, the need for school psychologists to be able to do consultation when teachers desire information about instructional questions.

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Table 1

Types of Questions Posed by Respondents

Question category	Percentage
Instructional	
Ability level	4.4
Content	0.7
Instructional activity	1.9
Materials	0.7
Methods	7.8
Prerequisites	0.7
Sequencing of instruction	0.4
Non-instructional	
Cause/nature of problem	13.0
Educational placement	4.8
Additional resources	5.2
Discipline/management	23.0
Emotional needs/values of student	14.1
Emotional needs of teacher	1.9
Parents/administration/community	8.5
Background information on student	7.8

Note. Figures represent the percentage of the total 270 questions that were posed.

Table 2

Persons Selected as Able to Answer Questions

	Questions	
Helper	Instructional	Non-instructional
Another regular teacher	8.3 (19.0)	9.6 (81.0)
Special education teacher	16.7 (34.8)	8.4 (65.2)
School psychologist	35.4 (34.7)	18.0 (65.3)
Curriculum specialist	2.1 (25.0)	1.7 (75.0)
Counselor	22.9 (13.9)	38.2 (86.1)
Speech therapist	4.2 (40.0)	1.7 (60.0)
Parent	0.0 (0.0)	9.0 (100)
Principal	10.4 (27.8)	7.3 (72.2)
Other	0.0 (0.0)	6.2 (100)

Note. The first numbers in each column represent the column percentages. Numbers in parentheses represent row percentages.